

How to Support Your Child's Academic Learning at Home

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As parents, we constantly are challenged as to how and when to support our children's learning at home. We have learned from teachers that children learn best when they are given the chance to explore academic experiences at their own pace through project-based learning



experiences. Within the classroom, a teacher strives to create a holistic learning environment that can adequately support the social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development of each child. At home, we can enhance our children's daily activities by allowing our children to explore and create at their own level of understanding with projects that facilitate learning.

For example, a preschooler, an elementary age child, a middle school child and their dad recently created a

container vegetable garden. The project included the following primary activities:

Research how to construct container gardens on the internet and in gardening books. Determine how much wood, nails, and other construction supplies will be needed to construct the container. Measure the area that will be covered by the container. Determine how deep the container should be for proper vegetable growth and irrigation.

Once the container supplies have been purchased, construct the container.

Determine how much dirt must be purchased for filling the newly constructed container and pour it into the container.

Identify the various vegetables that will grow best in a specific season and purchase the seeds. Plant the seeds according to the instructions for each type of vegetable.

Construct netting or other types of protection over the garden to ensure insects and animals cannot harvest the crops too soon.

Water each vegetable plant and fertilize as needed to ensure healthy growth.

Harvest crops as they mature. Plan meals that include the use of various vegetables from the garden. Create recipes that will include the harvested crops.

When we include our children in the planning and development of a container vegetable garden, the children can learn and explore the project-based learning at their own pace. The preschooler will be happy helping dad construct parts of the container,

shovel dirt into the container, plant larger vegetable seeds, sprinkle the vegetables with water, and help harvest and cook with the crops. The elementary age child could also help dad calculate the various amounts of materials that would be required for the construction of the container, the amount of soil required, and how many vegetables of each type could be planted in the container. The middle school child could additionally research the project's cost and help dad work within a specific budget. All three children, at these various levels of project-based learning, can benefit in their overall academic learning in language arts, math, science, and social studies. Added language arts and performing arts activities for all ages could include keeping a daily journal with illustrations on the growth of the various vegetables when considering changing weather patterns. The children at all ages could compare the growth of various types of vegetable plants to determine which plants grow best in their yard. Added research could be conducted on the use of various amounts of water and the impact on the growth of plants. Environmental conditions can also be researched on the internet to determine how to manage soil conditions, insect infestations, drought conditions, and other variables that can impact the healthy growth of the plants.

This one home project of growing a garden can expand each child's social-emotional growth by nurturing their creativity and responsible behaviors in managing their role in developing and maintaining the family garden. Children can cognitively grow in this experience at their own level of interest and academic understanding.

Each child can also participate in the outside activity that will build strength and endurance with the construction of the garden and the ongoing maintenance of the garden. Finally, the children will take pride in creating healthy recipes for the family that will include the use all of the vegetables. Typically, children who create or grow something will be more prone to eating it. They will also take pride in helping others appreciate their produce. When children learn to eat healthy meals at an early age, they tend to reinforce these healthy behaviors throughout life.

Our project-based learning sample of growing a family garden may seem simplistic, but it can have a lasting impact on the family. Each evening, the family can harvest the crops for a salad, discuss how each vegetable is growing while eating dinner, and determine how they can prepare new recipes that are healthy when using a variety of vegetables from the garden. If a family lives in an apartment that does not have garden space, many cities have community gardens that families can share and develop into vegetable gardens. Additionally, many seniors would be happy to have young families help them develop a shared garden in their yard. Families with younger children would also love to share in a family garden with older children in their neighborhood. Please email or comment on successful project-based learning experiences that you have shared with your children so we can summarize these creative projects in our next blog.

For more information on how to create project-based learning experiences for your children, check the

Generational Parenting Resource link on this website. You can also learn more about how to prepare for your spring conferences with your children's teachers on a Corwin Connect Blog titled 10 Strategies to Engage Parents created by our team at <http://corwin-connect.com/2016/05/10-strategies-engage-parents/>.

Happy projects!

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